



SPAIN

ELLA (SHE)

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Fuelabrada (Madrid). Eli having a walk in a park together with her family.

- ▶ Since 2014, photojournalist Marika Puicher has been following the life of Elian Angel Ruiz, a transexual adolescent from Madrid
- ▶ Elian, born Fernando, started being uncomfortable with her sex at age 2, raising concerns among his parents
- ▶ When Fernando was 9, his parents realized that the best thing for their son was to indulge his instincts. The boy was officially allowed to become a girl
- ▶ Between 11 and 13, Fernando, now Elian, started taking drugs to adapt her body to her gender identity
- ▶ During the past six years, a strong bond developed between photojournalist Puicher and Elian and her family. Puicher's project to document Eli's life is still ongoing



Fuenlabrada (Madrid). Eli's mother, a former beautician, helps her daughter to shave her eyebrows.



The family album with photos of Eli's childhood.



Eli when she was 11, in a small square of Lavapiés district in Madrid.



Fuenlabrada (Madrid). Eli, 15 years old, in her home.

Ella is a long term project, started in 2014 and still in progress, that describes the most significant stages of the growth of Elian Angel Ruiz, a transexual adolescent from Madrid.

I started taking pictures of Eli when she was 10 years old. I came back to Madrid in 2015 and for two weeks I have lived in close contact with Eli. We developed a strong and sincere bond, also with her family, based on the awareness of our common struggle for the right of being yourself. Since then, we have always been in contact and in April 2019 I met again with this young woman, now 15 years old, to continue the project.

When Eli was only two, her parents realised that their son felt like a girl and that her biological sex didn't match with her genre identity. At first her parents were concerned about this behaviour, but finally they understood that the most important thing was for their child to be happy and free to be what she desired. At age 9, Fernando officially became Elian – the male name has been changed on all her documents – and at 11 she started taking a testosterone-suppressor, a medicine with reversible effects. At 13, Eli started taking estrogen to adapt her body to her gender identity.

Several recent studies demonstrate that the suicide rate among adolescent and adult transexuals is far higher than in the rest of population and one of the main causes is the repression they go through in family life and in society. Eli's mother is a prominent spokeswoman of COGAM, an association that today gathers a hundred families of transexual children and fights for their right to grow serenely in a society that acknowledges them.

The aim of this project is to raise awareness and to inform about this matter, bringing Eli's pictures and life story in different contexts and countries, especially in those where the issue of transexual children is still a taboo.



Fuenlabrada (Madrid). Eli during a volleyball lesson. Eli plays in a female volleyball team.



Eli and her brother Natcho help to prepare the dinner.



Eli combs her hair before going out.



Eli's belly with the estrogen patch. Eli has been taking female hormones since she was 13 to adapt her body to her gender identity.



Fuenlabrada, (Madrid). Eli, 15 years old, and her brother Natcho, 12, in their bedroom.



Eli while her mother puts nail polish on her nails.



Eli, her brother Natcho and their mother in the livingroom of their apartment.



Fuenlabrada (Madrid). Eli in a square near her home.



A portrait of Eli, 15 years old.



Madrid. Eli with Axel, a 10-year-old transsexual boy. Axel's parents are members of the COGAM association and are fighting for the rights of transsexual children.



Eli does his homework. Eli attends the last year of the Educación Secundaria Obligatoria - E.S.O. (compulsory secondary education).



Madrid. A photo of Axel, when he was about four years old, with his parents. Axel today is 10 and is a transsexual boy.



Madrid. Eli when she was 11, sitting on Angela's laps. Both Elli and Angela are transexuals. They are biologically male but have always felt females. Angela is a volunteer of the Spanish Chrysalis, which welcomes and helps parents of trans children.



Eli, 15 years old, is wearing her new dress.



Eli, 15 years old, and her brother Natcho, 12, in their bedroom.



Eli has dinner with her brothers Natcho, 12, and Jaime, 17.



Eli during a volleyball lesson. Eli plays in a female volleyball team.



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